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SUBJECT: PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS DELAYED, BUT MOVING FORWARD

REF: MAPUTO 781

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Provincial elections in Mozambique originally set for December 20 face logistical difficulties, voter cynicism, protest by the Muslim community, and a budget shortfall. Despite these challenges, the GRM maintains its commitment to proceeding with the elections, but delayed them until January 16, 2008 to deconflict with a Muslim holiday. Local observers question whether or not the GRM can pull off a successful election amidst funding constraints and voter apathy. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The GRM scheduled provincial elections for December 20, despite widespread objections from government technical staff and civil servants (see reftel). Public opinion increasingly questions the need for these provincial elections, considering it a waste of resources to elect local officials with little power who meet infrequently throughout the year. Leaders in Mozambique's Muslim community (who form an estimated 25-40 percent of the population) also expressed disapproval since December 20 falls on the Islamic holy day of Eid.

¶3. (U) In response to growing uncertainty about the elections, government spokesman Luis Covane told the press on July 25 that the government would comply with the constitution and hold elections before the end of January 2008 "as part of the growth of democracy in Mozambique." Covane indicated that every effort would be made to ensure the elections take place, but admitted the government had not yet discussed how to raise the remaining money. Subsequently on July 26, President Guebuza issued a statement announcing the elections would be moved to January 16, 2008.

¶4. (SBU) The GRM budgeted only US\$12 million of the estimated US\$44 million needed for these elections and has lobbied the international donor community for the balance. However, donors to date have steadfastly refused to provide additional funding. Espousing a commonly-held EU position, the British Ambassador said he told Prime Minister Luisa Diogo that the GRM should budget for its own democratic processes. Diogo replied that the GRM would do so for their already scheduled 2008 and 2009 elections. A UNDP representative told Poloff that international observers believe the provincial elections could be held jointly with future national elections and that it is not logistically possible to have adequate administrative structures in place for the January elections.

¶5. (U) In the meantime preparations for the election continue apace. The GRM is designating voter registrars and providing related training. News media report a commitment by small political parties to gear up for the provincial elections, and both major parties insist they will fully participate.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Postponing the elections to deconflict with a Muslim holiday was a necessary move, though it has left some wondering how the GRM could have committed such a scheduling blunder

in the first place. The GRM's announcement to move forward with the elections in the face of apparent voter cynicism and continued donor reluctance to provide financial support has surprised many, but is consistent with the country's constitution and has the support of the two major political parties. The UNDP will host a meeting August 3 to canvass again for additional donor support. Local observers question whether or not the GRM can pull off a successful election amidst funding constraints and voter apathy. END COMMENT.

CHAPMAN